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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN - MANAGING THE NEIGHBORS: SAUDI ARABIA

REF: A. SECSTATE 85136

[1](#)B. RIYADH 01070

Classified By: CDA Ambassador Richard Erdman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (S) The following responses are keyed to questions in ref A and based in part on the August 16 meeting between Charge and Ambassador Khalid Al-Jindan (ref B).

a) Analysis of Saudi Arabia's likely strategic interests in Afghanistan's election: On multiple occasions, Saudi officials have told us that a stable Afghanistan is in their vital interest, and that there is no purely military solution to Afghanistan's problems. There must be a political component as well. In this regard, they believe we should look for opportunities to weaken the Taliban/Al-Qaeda alliance and peel away "moderate Taliban" who may be uneasy about Al-Qaeda's agenda and more nationalist in their orientation. They are supportive of the elections as a means to this end. While they have no stated preference for a particular candidate, they believe success in Afghanistan is impossible without Pashtun buy-in and thus look favorably upon candidates who have the potential, in their view, to "deliver" this ethnic group. The Saudis would prefer to see a stable, nationally-oriented government in Afghanistan, capable of resisting pressure from Iran and Al-Qaeda and willing to reach out to moderate Taliban elements.

b) Assessment of whether Saudi Arabia would be likely to urge restraint and play a positive role, publicly or privately: The Saudis are usually reluctant to comment publicly on the internal situation of other countries. However, given their long-standing interest and ties to Afghanistan, we would not exclude their using their private channels to assist behind the scenes in encouraging calm and unity and in driving a wedge between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

c) Advice on how we could best encourage Saudi Arabia to play such a role: The Saudis have told us that they share U.S. assessments and goals with respect to Afghanistan, and that they have been, and will remain, engaged in discussions with Afghan leaders as part of their overall Afghanistan strategy to promote stability and prevent further radicalization in the country. As such, they would likely act on their own in the event serious election-related violence appeared ready to destabilize the country. By continually communicating our interest and concerns to the Saudis in the lead-up to and during the elections, and emphasizing the critical role the Saudis have to play, they might be persuaded to exert this private pressure even before the situation visibly deteriorated.

ERDMAN